X

FIVE PRECEPTS (*PANCASILA*)

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1. Five Vices and Five Virtues

In many *suttas* regarding lay practice (*Anguttara* iii, 203), the Buddha explicitly warned of the **five vices,** which are dangers and enemies, and lead to hell. What are the five?

i) Killing living beings
ii) Taking what is not given
iii) Sexual misconduct
iv) Telling lies
v) Partaking of intoxicants

- One who has these five vices lives the home-life **without self-confidence.**
- One who has these five vices **breeds hatred** in this life or breeds hatred in the life hereafter, feels in his mind **pain and grief.**
- One who has these five vices is termed **'vicious'** and **arises in hell**.

In the same *suttas*, the Buddha spoke of the advantages of cultivation of the five virtues, which are the Five Precepts, namely:

i) Abstention from killing living beings
ii) Abstention from taking what is not given
iii) Abstention from sexual misconduct
iv) Abstention from telling lies
v) Abstention from partaking of intoxicants

- One who has these five virtues lives the home-life with **complete self-confidence.**
- One who has these five virtues **breeds no hatred** in this life, or in the life hereafter, nor does he feel pain and grief.
- One who has these five virtues is called **virtuous** and arises in the **happy plane** of existence.

The Five Precepts or Virtues (*Pancasila*) form the very core of moral discipline for the lay disciple. *Dhammapada* verse 183 summarizes the Teaching of the Buddhas as: "Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind." Thus by learning to avoid evil through the precepts, one initially begins to check the gross defilements and avoid transgressions of bodily and verbal actions.

2. Self-Responsibility in Moral Training

The Five Precepts form the actual **practice of morality** for the layman. They are the **minimum** ethical code, which are **mandatory** for all lay disciples. They are undertaken immediately after the taking of the Three Refuges at every Buddhist service or ceremony and are administered by a monk if one is present; otherwise the lay disciples can do it by themselves. It is usual for devout lay disciples to undertake the Five Precepts as part of their daily recitation. The Five Precepts are undertaken by reciting the following:

i) *Panatipata veramani-sikkhapadam samadiyami.*
The taking of life I undertake the training rule to abstain.

ii) *Adinnadana veramani-sikkhapadam samadiyami.*
The taking of things not given I undertake the training rule to abstain

iii) *Kamesu micchacara veramani-sikkhapadam samadiyami.*
Sexual misconduct I undertake the training rule to abstain.

iv) *Musavada veramani-sikkhapadam samadiyami.*
False speech I undertake the training rule to abstain.

v) *Sura meraya majja pamadatthana veramani-sikkhapadam* ***samadiyami.***
Intoxicating liquors, spirits and drugs that cause heedlessness I undertake the training rule to abstain.

The words ‘***veramani-sikkhapadam samadiyami***’ mean ‘abstinence-training rule I undertake’ are shared by all five and shows that they are **not commandments** imposed externally but training rules or precepts which one takes upon oneself through **one's initiative** and endeavors to follow with awareness and understanding. The emphasis here as throughout the entire path, is on **self-responsibility**.

3. Precepts are Indispensable in Moral Training

There are some who argue that since moral training is one's own responsibility, it is enough simply to have good intentions and let oneself be guided by one's sense of what is right or wrong. Having a set of rules of conduct is at best superfluous and worse still, they can lead to a dogmatic concept of morality or to a constricting and legalistic system of ethics. Although it is true that morality cannot be equated with a set of rules, yet these rules are necessary because they form the **actual practice of morality** by which one can curb the grosser forms of defilements.

The precepts help to cultivate moral behavior by a process involving the substitution of opposites. The actions prohibited by the precepts such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech and partaking of intoxicants are all rooted in **greed, hatred and delusion** and when we succumb to them, we strengthen these evil roots that they become dominant traits. By undertaking to observe the precepts, we weaken the grip of these evil roots by dispelling them with wholesome mental volitions. Consequently a process of substitution takes place in which the defilements are replaced by wholesome or moral states, which increasingly become more ingrained as we go on with the training. Each time the precepts are upheld, each time the moral volitions become strengthened, until eventually morality becomes a **habitual trait** through the **condition of repetition (*asevana paccaya*).**

The cultivation of good traits takes place by habitual recurrence and many passages are found in the scriptures exhorting wholesome cultivation by repetition. Thus even though at first, a practice arouses resistance from within, if it is repeated over and over again with understanding and development, the qualities it calls into play, such as wholesome volitions in the case of precepts, slowly become the dominant mental trait. Therefore, the Five Precepts are **indispensable** in the **cultivation of virtue** for the lay disciple.

4. *Dhamma* Way to Compare Oneself with Another

Once when the Buddha was in the village of Veludvara in Kosala country, He was asked by the villagers to teach them how to attain to the heavenly world where the virtuous are reborn. Thereupon the Buddha taught them to reflect on the *Dhamma* way to compare oneself with another, which leads to right understanding in the observance of the Five Precepts.

- **On the matter of killing**: Every person wishes to live and not to die; everyone is fond of pleasure and adverse to pain.

- If someone were to kill us, it would not be pleasing or delightful to us. Also if one kills another who wants to live and not to die, it would not be pleasing or delightful to the other person.

- So something that is not pleasing to oneself must also be not pleasing to another. Therefore something that is not pleasing to one-self should not be imposed on another.

As a result of this reflection, he himself abstains from killing living beings. He encourages others so to abstain and he speaks in praise of so abstaining. Thus his bodily conduct is absolutely pure in these three aspects. By similar reflection and reasoning, one acquires a better understanding and appreciation of each of the precepts.

In the case of the **fifth precept**, although the partaking of intoxicants appears to involve oneself only, it is the most dangerous because it can lead to the violation of all the precepts thereby causing **more harm** to **oneself and others**. Thus one who keeps the Five Precepts is an asset to oneself and others. In fact, in *Anguttara* iv, 245, the Buddha has compared the meticulous observance of the Five Precepts as five great gifts. By doing so, one gives **fearlessness, loving kindness and goodwill** to all beings by one's virtues.

5. First Precept: Abstention from Killing Living Beings

The word **'*panatipata*'** is derived from two words: **'*pana*'** which means 'living being' and **'*atipata*'** which means 'striking down', hence killing or destroying. According to the *Atthasalini* or Expositor, for killing to take place five conditions must be met.

i) The being must be alive.
ii) There must be knowledge that it is a living being.
iii) There must be intention to cause its death.
iv) Action must be taken to cause its death
v) Death must result from such action.

If all these conditions are fulfilled, then the precept has been broken.

<u>Conditions for Killing</u>

- The first important point to note is that there must be an **intention or volition** to kill. Volition is the mental factor responsible for the action (*kamma*). Without intention, there is no transgression as when we accidentally kill an ant while trying to pull it away from our body to prevent it from biting us. Killing is classified as immoral bodily action since it generally occurs via the body, but what really performs the act is the **mind using the body as its instrument**.

- The second important point is that the **action taken** to cause death need not occur directly through the body. It can be carried out by giving a **command** to kill by way of words, writing or gesture. The one who issues such a command becomes responsible for the action as soon as it achieves the intention of killing a living being. In extreme cases, killing can be effected by **occult practices or supernormal powers.**

- The third important point to note is that the precept is broken only when one is **aware** that the object of one's action is a **living being**. Thus if someone washes vegetables without knowing that there are caterpillars on the leaves and kills them, the precept is not broken.

- Lastly, the being must **die as a result** of this action. Thus if a killer is chasing his victim with a knife intent on killing him, but the latter accidentally trips on a rock and breaks his head resulting in death, although the victim died, his death was **accidental** and no killing has taken place.

Causes of Killing

Acts of killing can originate from **all three evil roots** of greed, hatred and delusion. The **proximate cause** of killing is always **hatred** accompanied by delusion because the force that drives the act is the impulse to destroy the being's life, a form of hatred. Although greed and hate cannot function simultaneously, **greed** accompanied by delusion can be the motivating factor in cases of killing to gain material benefits or high status for oneself, to eliminate threats to one's comfort and security, and to obtain enjoyment in hunting and fishing for sport. Killing motivated by hatred is seen in cases of vicious murder and manslaughter. Killing motivated by delusion is seen in cases of animal sacrifices done out of **wrong views** and killing the followers of other religions thinking it is a **religious duty.**

Factors Affecting the Gravity of the Act of Killing

The gravity of the act of killing depends mainly on the **qualities of the victim.** When the qualities are equal, the gravity varies according to the strength of the **defilements** and the **efforts** of the killer.

- With regard to moral qualities, **human victims** are said to possess moral qualities while **animal victims** are said to possess no moral quality; so the killing of a human is graver than the killing of an animal.

- Among humans, the most serious or gravest is the killing of one's **mother, father** or an ***Arahant***. To kill a person with superior spiritual qualities or to kill one's benefactor is more blameworthy than to kill an immoral or an unrelated person.

- In the case of animal victims, the gravity of the act generally depends on it **size;** the larger the animal, the more blameworthy the killing. Other factors that determined moral gravity are: whether it has an **owner** or is **ownerless**, **domesticated** or **wild**, **gentle** or **vicious** temperament. The moral gravity would be greater in the three former cases and lesser in the latter three.

- With regard to **defilements and effort**, a **cold-blooded murder**, intended and planned in advance and rooted in strong greed or hatred carries more weight compared to **impulsive killing** carried out in a fit of rage or in self-defense. The unwholesome volitions involved in the thinking and planning of the murder far outweigh those involved in an impulsive killing. The presence of **cruelty or torture** and the obtaining of **sadistic pleasure** from the killing further increase its gravity.

6. Second Precept: Abstention from Taking What is Not Given

The word **'*adinna*'** means **'what is not given'** and signifies the property of another in which he has **legal and blameless ownership**. Thus no offence is committed if the article has no legal owner such as firewood collected to make a fire or fruits gathered from the wilds. Blameless ownership becomes applicable in cases where a person has legal possession of an article but does so by improper means or uses it for unethical purposes, e.g., the **confiscation of property of drug traffickers, weapons**, which are used for destructive purposes. According to the *Atthasalini***,** five conditions must be met to break this precept.

i) An article belonging to another legally and blamelessly.
ii) Knowledge that the article belongs to another.
iii) There must be the intention to steal.
iv) Action must be taken to steal.
v) By the action, the article must be taken.

Types of Taking what is Not Given

Taking what is not given can be divided into many types.

i) The **most blatant,** involving threats or force, are daylight robbery, extortion, purse snatching, kidnapping.
ii) The second type is stealing or **secretly taking** the article without the owner's knowledge such as housebreaking, burglary and pick-pocketing.
iii) The third type is **fraud,** laying false claims or cheating by confidence tricksters to gain someone's possessions.
iv) The fourth type is **deceit** when dishonest traders cheat their customers by false weights and measures or supply products of lower quality than specified.
v) The fifth type is **forgery** when people pass counterfeit money as real or sell counterfeit gold and jewelry.

vi) The last type, though **seemingly slight**, is very common and occurs when employees take small items from their company for their own use without paying for it.

Causes of Taking what is Not Given

The act of taking what is not given can be rooted in **greed or hatred**, both being accompanied by delusion. Generally stealing is caused by greed. Hatred occurs when one person deprives another of an article, not so much because he wants it but because he resents the other's possession of it and wants to make the **victim suffer** through its loss.

Factors affecting the Gravity of Taking what is Not Given

The gravity of the act of taking what is not given is determined mainly by the **moral qualities** of the victim and the **value of the article** taken. Firstly, stealing from a morally virtuous person or a benefactor is more blameworthy than stealing from an immoral person or an unrelated person.

Secondly, stealing a valuable article is more blameworthy than stealing an article of little value. However, the value of an article need **not be equated** to its cash value. Thus, stealing an alms-bowl from a meditative monk who uses it to collect food is definitely more severe than stealing several thousand dollars from a rich man. Similarly, stealing the lecture notes from a student preparing for his exams will cause more grief to the victim than stealing his TV set.

The mental **volitions** behind the action and the **force of defilements** also contribute to the gravity of the act, with hatred being considered more severe than greed.

7. Third Precept: Abstention from Sexual Misconduct

This precept enjoins abstinence from improper or illicit sexual relations. The *Atthasalini* defines sexual misconduct as the volition arising in the **body-door**, through the unlawful intention of **trespassing upon a person** to whom one has no right of going. There are four conditions for wrong conduct in sexual pleasures.

i) There must be a man or woman with whom it is improper to have sexual intercourse.
ii) There must be intention to have sexual intercourse with such a person.
iii) Action must be taken to have such an intercourse.
iv) There must be enjoyment from contact of the sexual organs.

With reference to the first condition, there are twenty kinds of women with whom men should have no sexual relations. They can be divided into three groups, namely: women under the **guardianship** of parents, family members, relatives and authorities charged with their care; **married or betrothed** women; *bhikkhunis* and religious women **observing the Holy Life**. For all women, a man **forbidden by tradition** or under **religious rules** is prohibited as a partner. For any unwilling partner who is drugged or forced to have sexual intercourse under threat of violence or coercion, conditions (ii) & (iv) exclude them from violation of the precept.

Causes of Sexual Misconduct

The root cause of sexual misconduct is always **greed or lust**, accompanied by delusion.

Factors affecting the Gravity of Sexual Misconduct

The gravity of the offence is determined by the **degree of lust** motivating the action and the **qualities of the person** against whom the transgression is committed. When the lust is very strong, even incest and rape can be committed, the most serious being the rape of a female *Arahant.*

8. Fourth Precept: Abstention from False Speech

The characteristic of 'lying or falsehood' is the volition of one desirous of representing to others an **untrue thing as true**, which sets up a **corresponding intimation**. Four conditions must be met to break this precept.

i) The statement must be untrue.
ii) There must be an intention to deceive.
iii) An effort must be made to deceive.
iv) The other person must know the meaning of what is expressed.

False speech is expressed through **speech, writing, or bodily gestures** or even conveyed **through a third party** who may or may not be aware of the falsehood. Since intention is required, if someone makes a false statement believing it to be true, no transgression has occurred. But if one makes a false statement with **intention to deceive** and the other party **understands** what is expressed, then the **precept is broken** whether deception has occurred or not.

Causes of False Speech

The root causes of false speech are **greed, hatred and delusion**.

i) Greed is the root cause when false speech is used to obtain **material gain or status** for oneself or someone dear to oneself.

ii) Hatred is the root cause when false speech is used to **cause loss and bring harm and suffering to others.**

iii) Delusion is the root cause when it is used neither for one's gain nor to cause loss and harm to others, but for the sake of **enjoyment** such as lying for the sake of a joke, exaggeration to spice up a story, or flattery to please others, etc.

Gravity of the Act of False Speech

The gravity of the act of false speech depends on three factors, namely: **degree of benefits destroyed, motivation** and **recipient** of the false speech.

i) The gravity is light if little benefit is destroyed and heavy if a large benefit is destroyed as a result of the false speech.

ii) Falsehood is also less severe if the motivation is to save oneself or another from material loss or harm while it becomes more severe if the motivation is to cause material loss or harm to others.

iii) With regard to the recipient of the false speech, the gravity is greater if the recipient is a morally superior person or is one's benefactor while the gravity is less if the recipient has low moral qualities.

iv) The worst cases of falsehood are lying in a way that **defames the Buddha** and the ***Arahants*** or making **false claims of attainments** of *Jhana* (mental absorptions) or *Magga & Phala* (path & fruition). In the case of a monk, such falsehood leads to expulsion from the *Sangha.*

9. Fifth Precept: Abstention from Partaking of Intoxicants

The taking of intoxicants is defined as the volition leading to the **bodily act of ingesting** the intoxicant such as the drinking of alcohol, smoking of opium and marijuana, sniffing of cocaine or glue, injection of heroin into the veins, etc. There are four conditions for the partaking of intoxicants.

i) There must be an intoxicant.
ii) There must be the intention of taking it.
iii) Action must be taken to ingest it.
iv) There must be actual ingestion of the intoxicant.

Condition (iv) states clearly that the precept is broken once the intoxicant is **ingested intentionally**. It does not matter whether one is intoxicated or not as a result of the action. In taking medicines containing alcohol or intoxicating drugs for medical reasons, no breach of the precept is committed. This is because one's intention is to take the medicine to cure one's sickness.

Concerning the use of alcohol in medicine by monks, the Buddha allowed strong drink to be added to decoctions of oil as medicine. However certain monks used to add too much strong drink into their decoctions and they got drunk after consuming the medicinal oils. To prevent this from happening, the Buddha allowed monks to drink decoctions of oil containing strong drink in them, **provided neither the colour, nor the smell, nor the taste** of strong drink shall be sensible or detectable (*Vinaya* Texts, *Mahavagga* 14).

Thus the drinking of herbal wines containing mainly hard liquor or the adding of alcohol to food to enhance its taste should be discouraged even though some may think that there is no violation of the precept here. Knowing that it is an intoxicant and still taking it for its flavor/taste shows that one is not practising self-control. As for alcoholic herbal products, one should switch to equivalent products that do not contain alcohol.

It is known that intoxicants even in small amounts can make one less sensitive, heedless and easily swayed by the defilements. As one

starts to enjoy getting high on intoxicants, the effect becomes addictive and usage increases. Then, either they dull the mind or heighten the defilements that one loses the sense of shame and fear in performing immoral activities. **Without shame and fear,** there is no morality and a person **loses all restraints** in his conduct. Indeed, the breaking of the fifth precept is the most dangerous as it can lead to the breaking of all the remaining precepts. **Abstaining from intoxicants** therefore **prevents the misfortunes** that result from the use of intoxicants, namely: loss of wealth, quarrels and crimes, disease, loss of reputation through shameless behavior, negligence and madness.

Causes of Partaking of Intoxicants

The motivation for taking intoxicants **is greed accompanied by delusion.** No gradations of moral weight are given.

10. Benefits of 'Moderate Drinking': Fact or Fallacy?

Several studies have shown that people who drink one to two ounces of alcohol per day tend to live longer than people who drink more than this amount or who don't drink at all. (One ounce of alcohol is equivalent to a 30 ml glass of wine, one can of beer or one mixed drink.) Based on these findings, some physicians even began to encourage their patients to drink 'moderately'.

In his 1991 widely-acclaimed book entitled 'Program for Reversing Heart Disease, pages 277-278', the famous heart physician, Dr. Dean Ornish **refuted this fallacy** by citing the following facts:

i) First, subsequent, more careful analyses of the studies revealed that many of the people who did not drink at all chose to abstain because a number of them were in ill health or were recovering alcoholics. They died earlier not because they abstained from alcohol but because **they were sicker** to begin with.

ii) Second, one reason why people who drink 'moderately' may have lived longer is that they often have **more social support** than the non-drinkers. In Western culture, 'Happy Hour' is a socially acceptable way to take a break from work and relax with friends, family or spouses. Dr. Ornish suspects that the same benefits would also result from social support in activities not centred on drinking.

iii) Third, alcohol has a **direct, toxic effect** on the muscle of the heart, as well as other organs, especially the liver. Even drinking less than one drink per day has been found to double the risk of haemorrhagic stroke when compared with not drinking at all. A study of 87,526 female nurses found that women who consumed three to nine drinks per week had 3.7 times the risk of bleeding into their brains compared with non-drinkers.

iv) Fourth, in America, somewhere between 50 and 80 percent of all **fatal traffic accidents** are alcohol related (see news clip below).

v) Fifth, although alcohol does raise your HDL (good cholesterol), this is only half the story. There are two types of HDL, namely: HDL_2 and HDL_3. HDL_2 helps to protect against coronary heart disease but HDL_3 does not. **Alcohol raises HDL_3.**

vi) Sixth, a study of over 7,188 women aged twenty-five to seventy-four years found that moderate alcohol consumption was associated with 50 and 100 percent **elevation** in the risk of **breast cancer.**

'Responsible drinking' proponent jailed

Sunday Star, August 13, 2000: Seattle, USA

A prominent US author who championed 'moderate drinking' over abstinence as a way to handle alcoholism was sentenced on Friday to four years and six months in jail for a deadly car crash she caused while driving drunk. During the trial in Ellensburg, Washington, Audrey Kishline, 43, had pleaded guilty to driving while intoxicated

in April and crashing her small truck head-on into a car whose two occupants were killed. Kishline had three times the legal limit of alcohol in her blood and was driving east in the west bound lanes of a crowded inter-state highway. The victims were a man and his 12-year daughter.

Six years ago, Kishline founded the national Moderation Management (MM) movement after finding abstinence-based programmes, such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), 'demoralising'. Instead of accepting the AA rule that alcoholism is a lifelong affliction that can only be handled with constant sobriety, Kishline advocated a theory of responsible drinking. She outlined her ideas in the 1995 book *Moderate Drinking: The Moderation Management Guide for People Who Want to Reduce Their Drinking*. MM members were asked to follow a nine-step programme that includes 30 days of abstinence, followed by the establishment of personal 'drinking limits'. The MM guidelines also specify a 'zero tolerance' for drinking and driving. --dpa

11. Factors that Enhance the Keeping of Precepts

The abstentions of the Five Precepts are basically the mental factors of Right Action, Right Speech and Right Livelihood. They are accompanied by wholesome volitions called **morality of volition** that **dispels the unwholesome intentions** to break the precepts. Thus, morality does not function alone. It has a number of associates that function together to form the properties of morality. The mental factors that help to uphold the keeping of precepts are **moral shame & fear, faith, understanding, mindfulness, effort and patience.**

- **Moral shame (*hiri*)** and **moral fear (*ottappa*)** to do evil are the proximate causes of morality. Shame makes a person recoil from committing immoral deeds because a good man does not want his conscience to be defiled by evil. Fear stops one from evil because of fear of the dire consequences. Without them,

morality neither arises nor persists. They differentiate man from beast and prevent mankind from committing acts of bestiality even at the time of very low civilization. So ***hiri*** and ***ottappa*** are known as ***Lokapala Dhamma***, *Dhamma* that guards the world.

- **Faith (*saddha*)** is belief in the **Law of *Kamma*** i.e. good results will follow the good deeds of keeping the precepts while breaking the precepts will lead to suffering. Faith cleanses the mind of impurities that motivate the breaking of precepts.

- The keeping of precepts should not be undertaken as a blind dogmatic submission to external rules but as a fully conscious **process of moral training guided by understanding (*panna*)**. Once we understand for ourselves what kinds of actions are wholesome and unwholesome, why one should be pursued and the other abandoned, and the consequences of keeping and breaking the precepts, we will begin to appreciate and observe the precepts properly.

- **Mindfulness *(sati)*** is awareness or attentiveness of our **bodily and mental processes**. With mindfulness, one is **able to check** what feelings and states of mind that are impelling one towards certain courses of action and what thoughts form the motivation or volition. One who is mindful will not forget his undertaking of the precepts, so one can avoid the unwholesome and develop the wholesome.

- **Effort *(viriya)*** here means **Right Effort**, the application of energy to **steer the mind** away from unwholesome states towards wholesome states. Effort does the work of moral training guided by **mindfulness** and **understanding.**

- The last factor is **patience *(khanti)***, which is non-hate. Patience enables one to **endure** the offensive actions of others without becoming angry or seeking retaliation thereby curbing the defilements of greed and hatred, the root causes of transgressions of precepts.

12. Consequences of Breaking & Keeping the Five Precepts

According to the Discourse on the Bad Effects of Evil Deeds, *Anguttara* iv, 247, **breaking of precepts** when pursued, practised, increased, causes one to arise in hell, in the animal world and in the world of ghosts. If reborn as a human being, the following are the very least results:

- Killing will lead to **shortening of one's life**.
- Stealing will lead to **loss of one's wealth**.
- Sexual misconduct will breed **rivalry and hatred.**
- False speech will cause one to be **falsely accused**.
- Partaking of intoxicants will cause one to be **afflicted with insanity.**

On the other hand, the **observance of the Five Precepts** leads to the accumulation of wholesome *kamma* tending to rebirth in the happy realms of humans or deities. If reborn as a human being, the following are the results:

- Abstention from killing will lead to **longevity.**
- Abstention from stealing will lead to **prosperity.**
- Abstention from sexual misconduct will lead to **popularity.**
- Abstention from lying will cause one to have a **good reputation**.
- Abstention from partaking of intoxicants will lead to **mindfulness and wisdom.**

In the *Mahaparinibbana sutta*, the Buddha expounded to the villagers of Pataligama the **five blessings** gained by one who observes the precepts and who is established in morality.

i) He acquires **much wealth** as a result of his diligence.
ii) He acquires a **good reputation** and fame.
iii) He approaches and enters any assembly of nobles, brahmins, householders and monks with **complete self-confidence**, without any fear or hesitation.
iv) He lives the full span of life and **dies undeluded**.
v) After death, he is **reborn** in the **happy realms** of humans or *devas*.

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